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## CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS

### LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE.<sup>1</sup>

#### FRANCE.

I am in receipt of a small volume from the pen of Mme. C. Coignet on the evolution of the French Protestantism of the 19th century<sup>2</sup> and which deserves to be called to the attention of the readers of *The Monist*.

Mme. Coignet briefly expounds the history of Protestantism in France and concludes by expressing her desire for a conciliation, a union between "Christian souls." From the "nationalistic" point of view I would like to make a few reservations on the political attitude of Protestants in the history of our country and on the validity and motives of the Act of Separation of Church and State.

It seems to me that Mme. Coignet does not appreciate the position of the Catholics previous to this law. As opportune as the fact of the separation itself appears to be, we cannot approve entirely of the spirit in which it was made nor the conditions under which it has been applied. It is not at all hard for Protestants to accommodate themselves to it, for it was not directed against them but entirely against the Catholic Church, and the fine speeches of our ministers can deceive no one on this point. I do not at all deny that faults have been committed on the other side; I know indeed that ecclesiastics are not wanting who are deeply distressed by the uncompromising attitude of the Holy See. Unfortunately it is no less undeniable that the Catholics have not been encouraged to rely upon the good faith of their opponents. That they were justified in suspecting them is sufficiently proved by the fact that those in control use acts of reprisal against the believers, and these acts are

<sup>1</sup>Translated from the French by Lydia Gillingham Robinson.

<sup>2</sup>*L'évolution du protestantisme français au XIXe siècle.* Paris: F. Alcan, 1908.

of such a nature that no government should ever descend to their use.

But I shall leave these considerations which are of no great interest to your readers, and I shall come at once to the vital part of the little book which has been the occasion of these remarks.

With regard to the great Christian movement which arose toward the end of the 18th century simultaneously in England, Scandinavia and Holland against religious indifference and formalism, Mme. Coignet pertinently remarks that even though the revival might free the individual religious life from the ecclesiastical yoke, it would nevertheless in the guise of doctrine forge anew the chain which it had broken in the guise of the Church. It would, she says, renew it even more closely, for doctrine is abstract and unchangeable, while the Catholic Church humanized by its representatives always has the power to modify itself.

As a result of the revival in France we can see the vague disagreements of former days taking on a new aspect, the Free Church arrayed at the side of the State Church, and the doctrinal party merging into the ecclesiastical division. Formerly there were three parties in the ranks of Protestantism; traditional orthodoxy separated from the liberals by doctrine, and from the disciples of the revival by the Church idea; the liberals separated from each other by doctrine, but allied to the orthodox by the Church idea; and finally, the disciples of reform united to the orthodox by doctrine, but separated from the two parties of the official Church by the same ecclesiastical idea.

I pass over in silence how the reformed orthodoxy was divided at that time (in 1848 and 1849), and how the Protestants, in order to excommunicate each other, again revived within their midst the Catholic absolutism from which they had suffered so much. I shall not now recall the conflicts engaged in, nor the attempts at union during the course of the last fifty years. It is sufficient to mention here the assembly of October 4, 1906, and the synod of Tuesday, April 9, 1907, which will count as noteworthy events in the history of French Protestantism. In the October meeting they had to decide on the attitude they were to take with regard to the Separation Act which had just been passed, and it seemed well that the different sections of reform should unite at this time on practical ground for the defence of common interests without entering upon it seriously or even intentionally neglecting the weighty problems of institutions and doctrine.

The declaration of October 4 would pass over the dangerous question of dogmas and establish unity "on the unique religious value of the Bible, the document of the progressive revelations of God, and on the personality of Christ to which the Bible bears witness." It accepts and proclaims that "the progressive character of divine revelation leaves an open field to the discoveries of exegesis brought to light by the history of comparative religion." Is not this, many people think, a very strange subterfuge? And is not the attitude of all philosophical minds equally delicate and difficult whether in liberal or orthodox Protestantism or in the ranks of Catholicism?

Indeed, union can never be established among Christian souls except on moral grounds, on the beneficence of the Christian spirit. Such without doubt is the conclusion of Mme. Coignet, to whose generous thought I wish to pay homage.

The churches which admit private judgment differ from the churches of authority in that they substitute individual religious experience for all the tangible forms of faith, institutions, and hierarchy. The gulf between Catholics and reformed denominations is not to be found in the nature of faith, but in the means by which it is transmitted. "I once heard," writes Mme. Coignet, "two Catholic priests of undeniable orthodoxy at the conclusion of a religious interview say to a Protestant: 'You are not in the body of the Church, but you are in its *soul*, and we will meet again in the other world.' Why then may we not come together in this life, respecting the diversity of our religious needs in the diversity of our symbols?"

This is the right note, but will it be heard? I wish so sincerely but do not believe it. In France the Catholics are universally distrustful of Protestants, and the Protestants do not understand that the fall of the Catholic edifice far from helping them will crush them under its ruins. It is generally the case that parties, like vanquished nations, perish not from attacks made upon them but from errors which they themselves commit.

LUCIEN ARRÉAT.

PARIS, France.

## PHILOSOPHIC TOLERANCE.

### A WINTER REVERY.

To-day as I sit before the warm grate fire with the snow-flakes falling outside, I feel in a peculiarly dreamy and charitable mood